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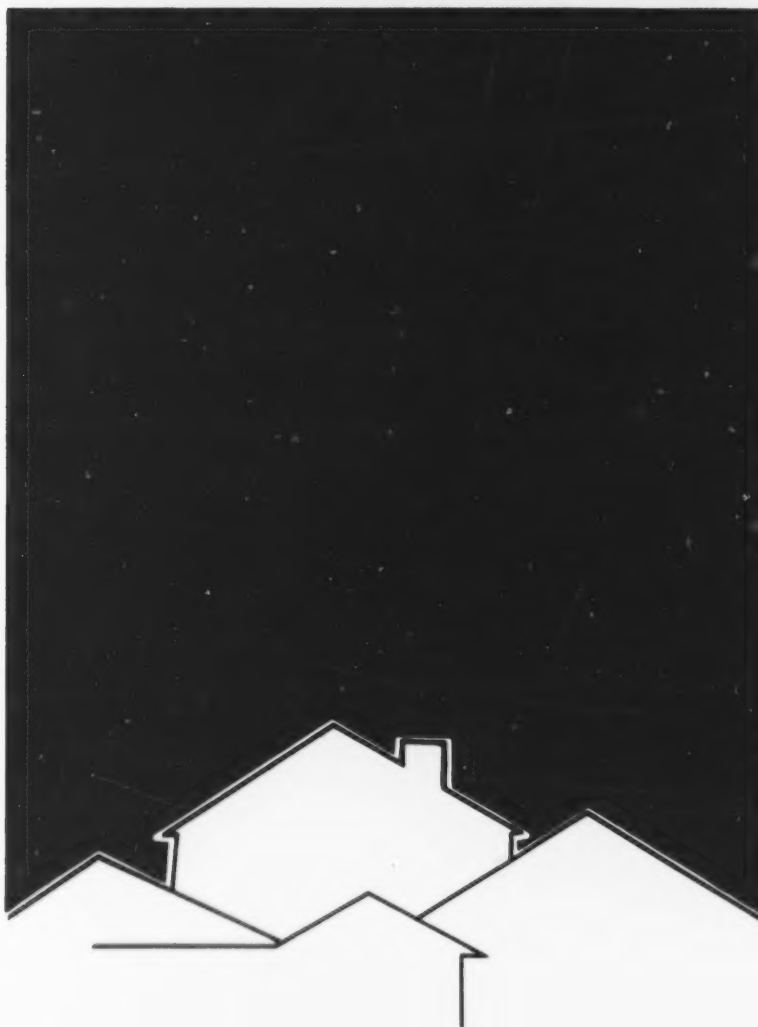
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ABSTRACT

This document contains information on the Consumer Housing Information Service for Seniors (CHISS), a local service organized under the auspices of the American Association of Retired Persons and a local agency or organization that serves the elderly, which uses trained Housing Information Volunteers to provide information on an individual basis to older persons in the community who are interested in learning more about housing and housing-related services. An overview section describes the philosophy and background of CHISS and explains the roles of the CHISS Housing Information Volunteer; the local CHISS lead agency, coordinator, and coalition; the American Association of Retired Persons; and the CHISS organizers and trainers. Charts and diagrams are provided which illustrate the relationships between the various components of the CHISS organization. The final section summarizes roles and responsibilities of these components. (NB)

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CHISS Information Pak



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Consumer Housing Information Service for Seniors (CHISS)

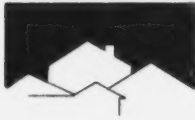
Consumer Affairs • Program Department
American Association of Retired Persons



I. Introduction

Learning about suitable housing and living arrangements poses a real problem for many older persons. The range of possibilities is complex and there is often no single, comprehensive resource in a community. To help meet this need, the Consumer Affairs Section of AARP's Program Department, in cooperation with the Administration on Aging (AoA), has developed CHISS (Consumer Housing Information Service for Seniors).

CHISS is a local service organized under the auspices of AARP and a local agency or organization that serves the elderly. Using trained Housing Information Volunteers (HIVs), CHISS provides information on an individual basis to older persons in the community who are interested in learning more about housing and housing-related services.



II. Overview

CHISS Philosophy and Background

Older persons need to make their own informed decisions about their housing situation after full consideration of the options available to them. Information about these options should be available from an independent source and presented in a complete, accurate and impartial manner supplemented by referral to competent professional or voluntary services and advisors when required.

Background

The range of housing options and related social services available to older homeowners has changed dramatically in recent years. The continuum has been broadened from choices that basically included either being well and living in your own home, or being sick and living in a nursing home. The introduction of new housing and finance options has provided older consumers with a variety of alternatives administered through public, private, voluntary, federal, state, county and municipal agencies. Programs now available include home delivered services (such as homemaker services, home health care and meals programs), home improvement and maintenance programs, congregate housing programs, board and care homes, retirement communities, ECHO housing, accessory apartments, and shared housing arrangements. More recently, a variety of home equity conversion instruments have been introduced that are designed to help elderly homeowners unlock the equity in their homes and convert it into a cash resource, while they remain in their homes.

Older renters and homeowners seeking information that will enable them to maintain or improve their housing situation are faced with a complex and confusing range of problems and service options. Their problems are complicated by the fact that the availability of these programs and resources varies from state to state, county to county and community to community. Even at the local level, housing and service options are scattered through various public and private service agencies, making it difficult for the older person to locate those programs that can best serve their needs.

It is critical that older persons have access to information that enables them to weigh the advantages and disadvantages, risks and benefits of the various options. The availability of unbiased "arm's length" information, supplemented by referral to competent legal and financial advice, is one of the best safeguards for the well-being of the older population.

Role of the CHISS Housing Information Volunteer

To provide older persons with an independent source of housing information at the local level, AARP has developed a volunteer program called CHISS; CHISS is a locally-based, locally-sanctioned program staffed by trained Housing Information Volunteers (HIVs). These individuals are able to provide impartial information free of charge to older consumers on the full range of housing services and financial options available in their communities.

Under the CHISS program, local HIVs are available to meet individually with older persons to discuss their particular housing situations. HIVs do not provide advice or make decisions. They simply provide the information older persons need to make informed decisions about their particular housing future.

Role of the Local CHISS Lead Agency, Coordinator and Coalition

The CHISS program is organized at the local level by a CHISS Lead Agency that is supported by a coalition of local housing and related agencies and organizations. The key to the success of the CHISS program is the Lead Agency's commitment to work with AARP in setting up a local organizational structure to recruit volunteers, schedule training sessions, and promote acceptance of CHISS and its use by older persons, their family and friends. The Lead Agency usually assigns a staff person to serve as the local CHISS Coordinator.

The ongoing success of the CHISS program depends on the development of a local coalition of housing and related agencies and organizations. This coalition provides local credibility and continued support for the CHISS program. It also provides a focal point for advocating improvements in housing and related services for older persons.

Each CHISS Lead Agency is encouraged to recruit a corps of 7-12 HIVs to be trained by AARP. The initial training session lasts 15 hours. Once the HIV corps is trained, the availability of the service can be promoted through local newspapers and newsletters, social service agencies and other appropriate media. The CHISS Coordinator is usually responsible for managing these publicity efforts.

Inquiries received from older individuals, their friends and families, are channeled by the CHISS Coordinator to HIVs who are available, upon request, to meet with older persons to discuss their particular housing situations.

The CHISS Coordinator will monitor the HIVs' success in informing older persons about their housing options. Among other things, this information can be used by the local CHISS Coalition of Sponsors to develop community planning and advocacy initiatives to improve housing options for older persons.

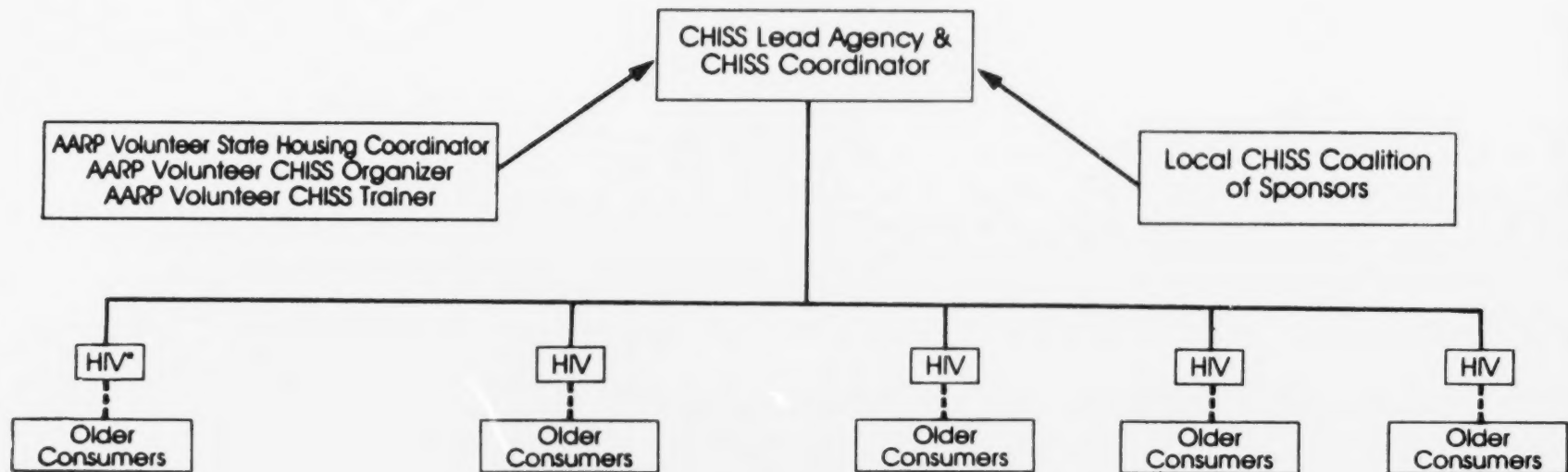
Role of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)

AARP's role in the establishment of a local CHISS program is one of facilitator, technical assistant and resource. AARP provides volunteer CHISS Organizers and Trainers who work with each local CHISS Lead Agency to organize the coalition of sponsoring agencies, recruit and train HIVs and set up the local CHISS publicity effort. AARP also provides each local CHISS Lead Agency with organizational, training and resource manuals. AARP's Consumer Affairs staff is available, as needed, to provide ongoing consultation. Current information is provided through a regular housing newsletter. AARP monitors local CHISS program results, provides ongoing evaluation, and helps provide publicity for the program.

Role of CHISS Organizers and Trainers

AARP volunteer CHISS Organizers and Trainers work under the direction of AARP's Volunteer State Housing Coordinator at the state and local level to promote and explain the CHISS concept, help develop the local CHISS Coalition, arrange for orientation sessions with potential CHISS Coalition sponsors and candidates, and help recruit and train HIVs. The AARP Volunteer State Housing Coordinator, CHISS Organizers and CHISS Trainers will work closely with the local CHISS Coordinator to inaugurate the program and help monitor its ongoing operations.

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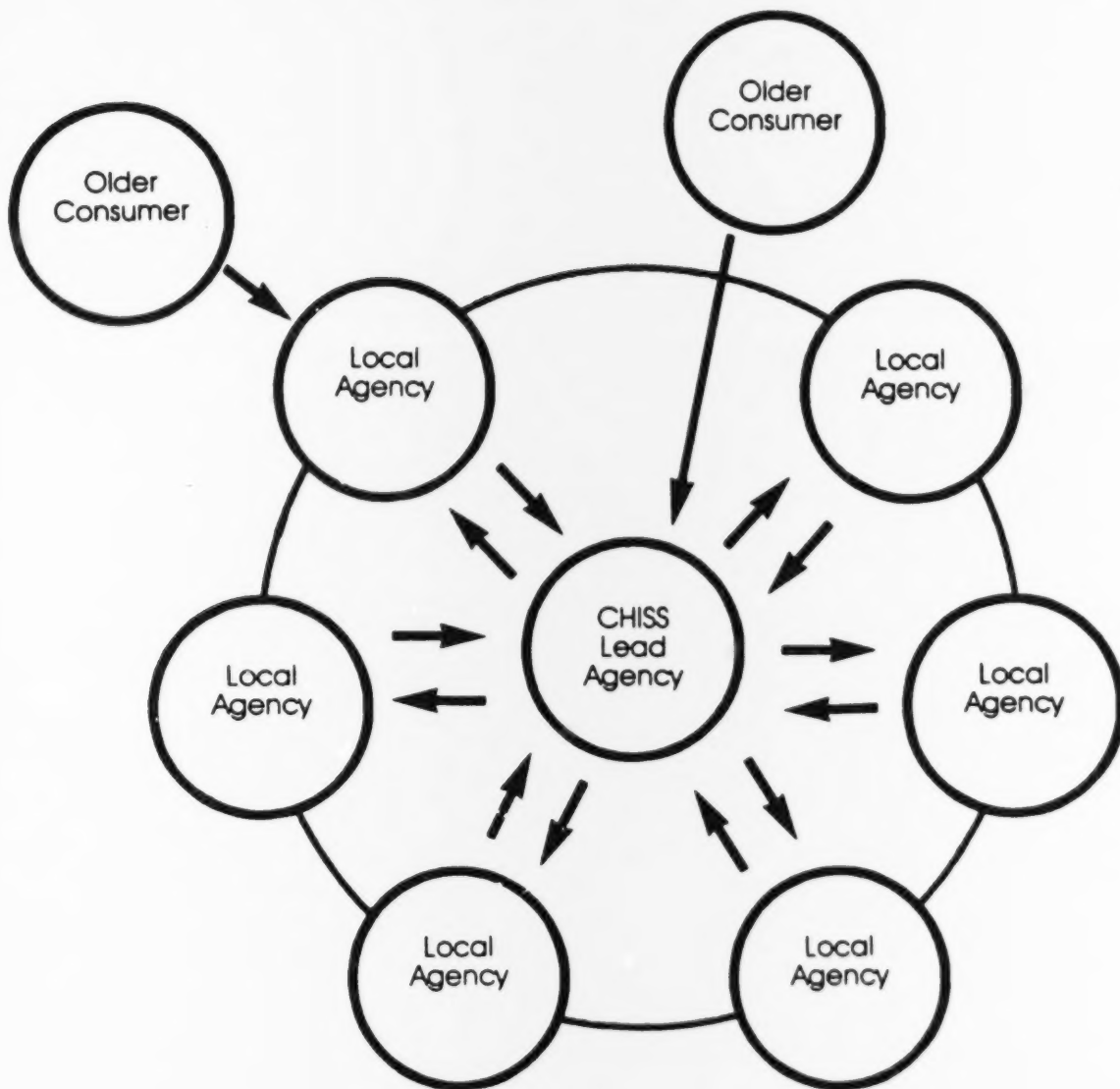
*HV = Housing Information Volunteer



Consumer Housing Information Service for Seniors (CHISS)

Outline

This diagram illustrates the relationship between the local CHISS Lead Agency and the local CHISS Coalition (or the cooperating local agencies).

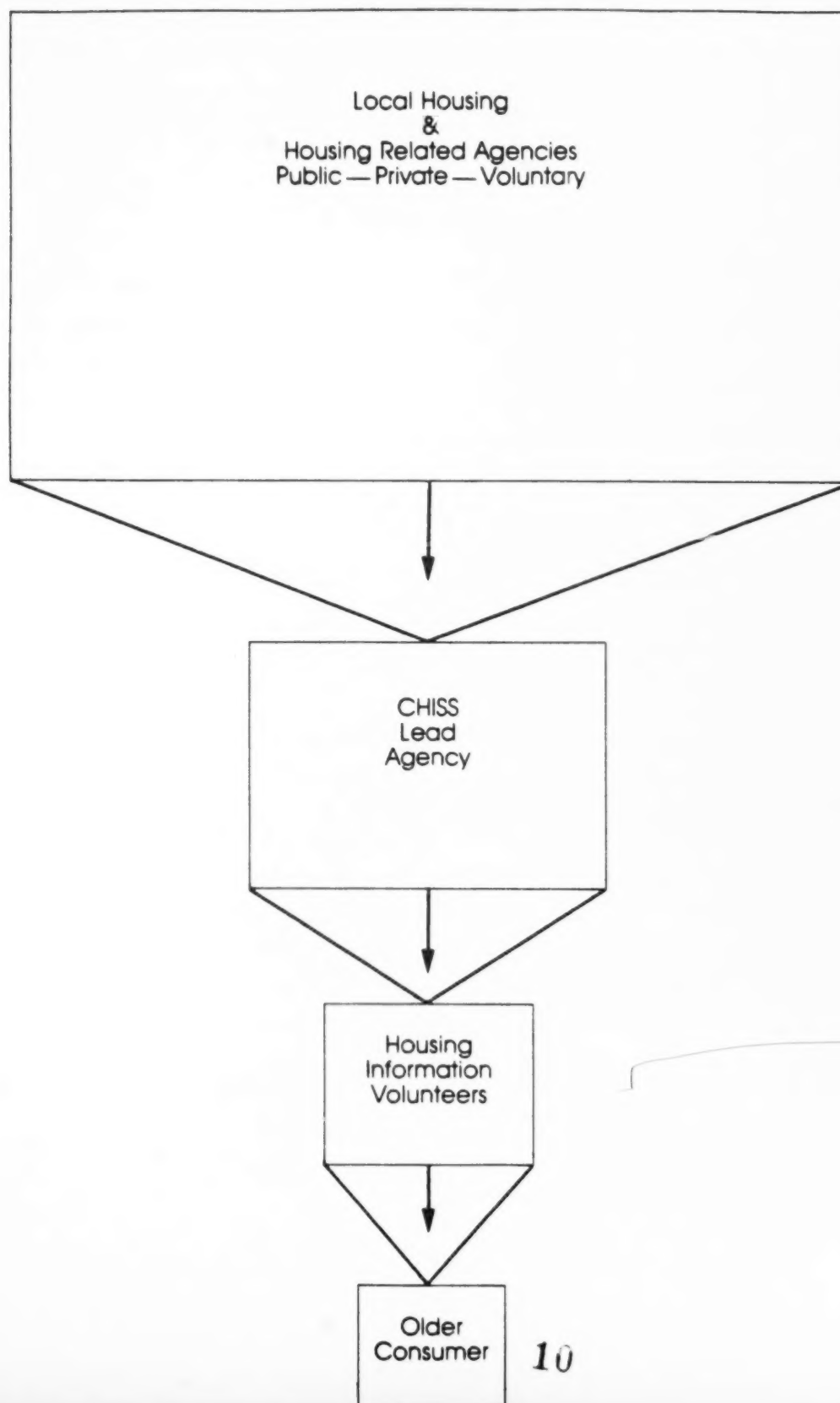


The CHISS program encourages cooperation and coordination among the various public, private and voluntary agencies at the local level, and makes it easier for the older consumer to access the system and obtain needed information and services. They can enter the system through either contacting the local CHISS Lead Agency or any one of the cooperating local agencies.

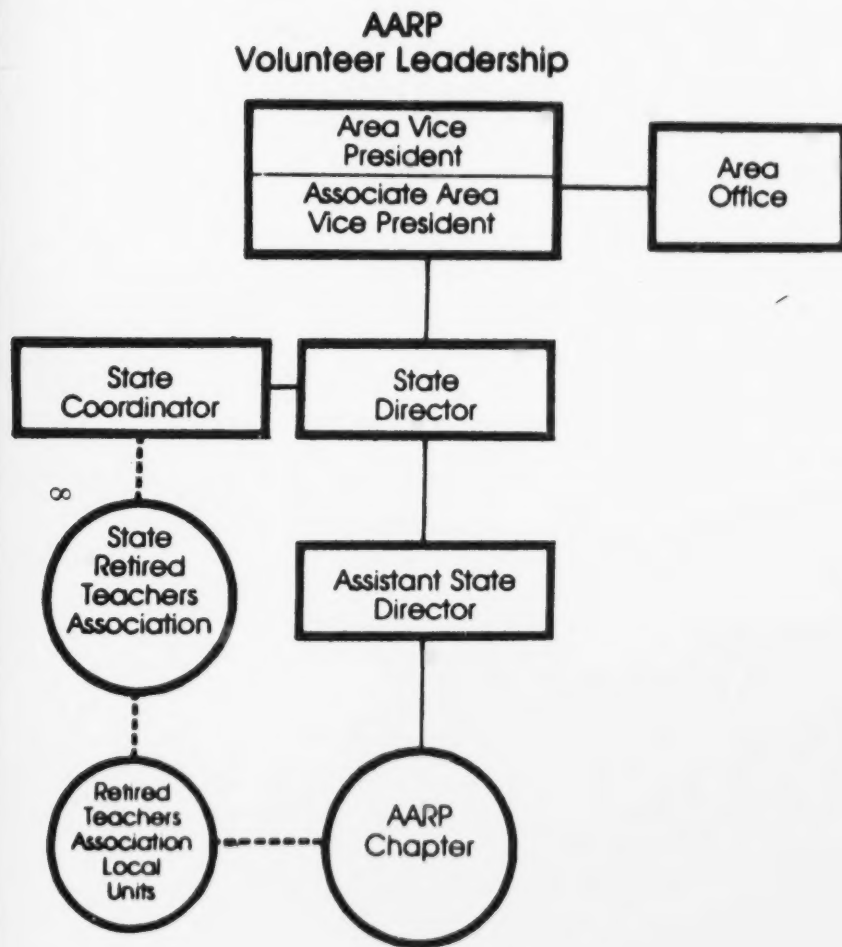


Consumer Housing Information Service for Seniors (CHISS)

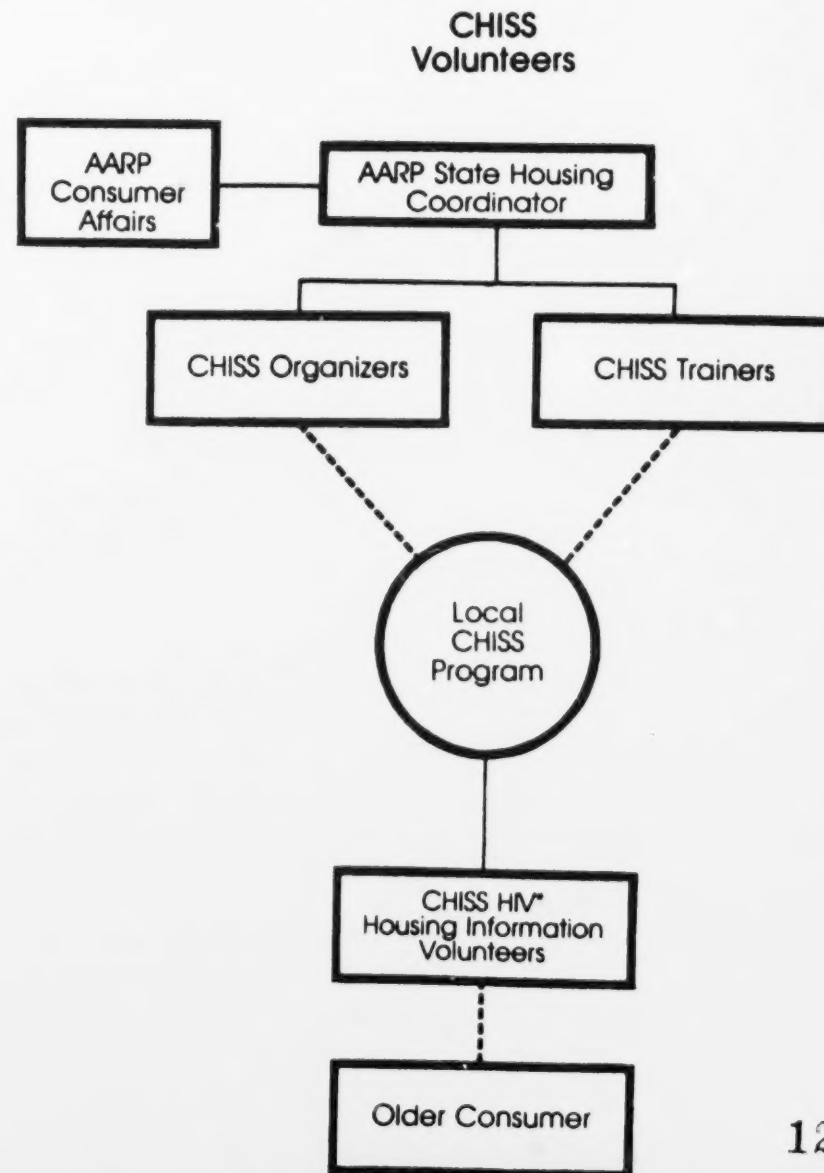
Overview

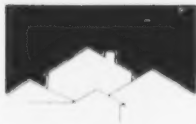


AARP
Working Relationships Between AARP Volunteer Leaders
and the AARP Consumer Housing Information Service for Seniors (CHISS) Program



Staff





III. Summary of Roles and Responsibilities

CHISS Lead Agency

The Lead Agency is often a state or area agency on aging, since these agencies are responsible for providing many of the services to be delivered through the CHISS program. However, other agencies and volunteer organizations may assume the Lead Agency role if they are able to provide a CHISS Coordinator and the necessary resources to support the Coordinator's responsibilities.

The CHISS Lead Agency:

1. Provides support services and resources, including:
 - secretarial services
 - office space
 - telephone
 - printing and duplication
 - meeting space
 - mailings to CHISS Coalition sponsors and HIVs.
2. Establishes a local focal point for inquiries from older consumers, their friends and families.
3. Appoints a local CHISS Coordinator who will assume primary responsibility for recruiting and supervising the HIVs, convening the meetings of the local CHISS Coalition and providing periodic reports on the progress and problems encountered by the HIVs.

Local CHISS Coordinator

The local CHISS Coordinator is usually a full-time paid staff person on the Lead Agency staff.

The local CHISS Coordinator:

1. Recruits HIVs.
2. Coordinates training of HIVs with the AARP Volunteer State Housing Coordinator.
3. Reports to the local CHISS Coalition and the AARP Consumer Affairs office on the activities, consumer contacts, problems and progress of the HIVs.
4. Receives and refers consumer inquiries to HIVs.
5. Monitors HIV-consumer contact to identify training needs and to get feedback on the types of housing services the consumers are referred to.

6. Keeps records of HIV and CHISS Coalition activities and maintains regular contact with the AARP CHISS Volunteer Organizer and Trainer.
7. Develops and coordinates community publicity about CHISS.
8. Assists in the development of a Local Housing Resource Guide.

HIVs

HIVs can be recruited from a variety of public, private and voluntary agencies, including AARP chapters, RTA (Retired Teachers Association) units, RSVP (Retired Senior Volunteer Program), local Coalition agencies or the community at large. Each HIV must be willing to attend training sessions, be available up to 20 hours per month, submit Consumer Visit Reports and follow guidelines for consumer assistance as outlined in the training sessions. The HIV:

1. Assists the consumer with housing problem identification and clarification.
2. Provides information on housing options available to the consumer in that community.
3. Provides referrals to and facilitates access to appropriate local housing programs and services.
4. Provides suggested methods the older consumer can use to evaluate housing options.
5. Follows up with additional information, referral and support for consumers, as needed.

Local CHISS Coalition

The local CHISS Coalition is made up of local agencies and public, private, and voluntary organizations that are concerned with providing accurate and useful information to older persons about housing options available in their community. This Coalition may include but is not limited to: area agencies on aging; local housing authorities; welfare; public assistance and social service departments; family service agencies; AARP chapters and RTA units; county extension agencies; and public housing authorities; offices of community development; and religious organizations.

The CHISS Coalition:

1. Provides local sanction and support for CHISS.
2. Provides a vehicle for pooling and coordinating local resources.
3. Provides an avenue for community planning, advocacy and initiative to improve and increase housing options for older consumers.
4. Provides a network for referring inquiries to the CHISS Coordinator, and, through the Coordinator, the HIVs and local service agencies.
5. Provides a means to widely publicize CHISS.
6. Provides a source for recruitment of HIVs.
7. Provides information for development of a local Housing Information Resource Guide.

AARP Volunteer CHISS Organizer: The CHISS Organizer works with potential Lead Agencies to facilitate the establishment of CHISS in a community. The Organizer will then work with the local CHISS Coordinator and AARP Volunteer CHISS Trainer to bring the CHISS program to its operational stage. The Organizer is appointed and supervised by the AARP State Housing Coordinator.

AARP Volunteer CHISS Trainer: The Trainer is a specially-prepared volunteer who works with the local CHISS Coordinator to train HIVs during an initial 15-hour program and then through regularly scheduled ongoing training sessions. The Trainers are appointed and supervised by the AARP Housing Coordinator and trained by the AARP Consumer Affairs Section.

AARP Consumer Affairs Section: Staff in this section located in the national AARP office provide publications, training materials and specialized training to State Housing Coordinators, CHISS Coordinators and Trainers; monitor and evaluate CHISS program activities; and provide follow-up training and support as needed. For additional information on the CHISS program, please write to:

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Consumer Affairs • Program Department



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